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COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 40th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Tuesday, 23 November 1999, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Mrs. BONOAN-DANDAN

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS:

(a) REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES IN ACCORDANCE WITH ARTICLES 16 AND 17 OF THE COVENANT (continued)

Initial report of Armenia (HRI/CORE/1/Add.57; E/1990/5/Add.36; E/C.12/Q/ARM/1; written replies to the list of issues, provided by the Government of Armenia (document without a reference number)) (continued)

1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, the delegation of Armenia resumed their places at the Committee table.

2. Mr. RIEDEL, referring to number 38 of the list of issues, asked what concrete steps had been taken to enact the draft laws listed in paragraph 235 of the initial report (E/1990/5/Add.36), reorganizing the health-care system. Further, concerning the environmental health risks referred to in paragraph 242, he wished to know what progress had been made in establishing safe environmental conditions since the drafting of the report. In connection with the denationalization of pharmacies, he wished to know the rural-to-urban stockout ratio, and what steps the Government was taking to improve the rural situation in that regard.

3. Mr. SADI, lamenting the fact that only a couple of lines had been devoted in the report to statistics on cancer and cardiovascular disease, which were two important yardsticks by which the health of Armenians could be measured, called for updated statistics on those diseases and on progress made in dealing with contaminated food and water.

4. Mr. PILLAY, while welcoming the enactment of the Disabled Persons Welfare Act, said that a report prepared by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) had revealed that the disabled were still discriminated against and that hospital facilities for them continued to be sub-standard. Was any remedial action being taken?

5. Mr. AHMED, referring to article 12, asked the delegation to provide specific information on tuberculosis, the incidence of which was a major cause of the deteriorating health of Armenians, having risen from 16.6 per cent in 1990 to a current 21.6 per cent, with a twofold increase among those under 14 years of age. He also noted that the President of the NGO Armenian Family Health had drawn attention to the severe reproductive health problems caused by the widespread recourse to abortion rather than contraceptives and adequate family planning. Although the practice had made for a low fertility rate, it had also contributed to an alarmingly high female mortality rate.

6. Mrs. JIMÉNEZ BUTRAGUEÑO, referring to questions 38-40 on the list of issues, considered that not enough was being done to install ramps and stairs in public places, on public transport and in the homes of the elderly; that was both an important and an inexpensive undertaking.

7. Mr. KAZHOYAN (Armenia) said that in the first four years of the post-independence transition period, the authorities had made a comprehensive reassessment of Armenian society, and particularly of the situation of the disabled who were unable to participate fully in public life. The topic had been widely debated by NGOs and the Government and it had been agreed in principle that their integration into society was vital. On the basis of United Nations standards for integrating the disabled into society, the Yerevan city authorities had embarked on projects to adapt conditions in towns, villages and rural areas to the needs of people with disabilities. The Ministry of Education and Science was also implementing a project aimed at abolishing the former Soviet system of special schools for the disabled and gradually integrating them into the regular education system. Following an initial period during which the topic had been regarded as taboo, the inauguration of facilities suited to the disabled had become a topic of daily discussion. The next stage was to consolidate and finance the projects.

8. In reply to Mrs. Jiménez Butragueño's suggestion, he said that the Yerevan city aut' orities were already discussing measures to facilitate access for the disabled. A start had been made on some buildings in Yerevan, including the United Nations Information Centre, and similar works would follow in the provinces. The needs of the disabled were taken into account in all new construction.

9. He was unable to furnish additional statistics on the incidence of cancer, cardiovascular disease and tuberculosis, but those diseases were being addressed by a number of national and international programmes. UNICEF's 1994 and 1999 child health surveys had culminated in programmes on reproductive health, antenatal maternal and child health, sexual health and family planning. Those activities were all carried out under the auspices of the wife of the President, herself a paediatrician, while the wife of the previous President, also a doctor, had worked tirelessly on that issue with positive results.

10. Replying to a question from Mr. Ahmed on tuberculosis incidence, he said there was excellent cooperation between the Armenian Red Cross and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in fighting the disease, which was rampant in Armenian prisons, where inmates were supervised by qualified doctors and received specialized medical care.

11. Mr. SAMVELIAN (Armenia) said that of the eight measures listed in paragraph 234 of the initial report, the only one not fully implemented was the medical insurance system. Responding to Mr. Sadi's question, he said the only statistics available covered the incidence of breast cancer, which stood at 32.6 per cent, and cervical cancer, which was slightly less prevalent. One problem was late diagnosis, women being, for psychological and financial reasons, often reluctant to seek a consultation. In reply to Mr. Ahmed's question, he said that abortion had been legalized and any woman could seek an abortion on the legal conditions stipulated. It was by far the most frequently used family-planning method.

12. Mr. KAZHOYAN (Armenia) said that a National Mammography Centre had recently been opened with support from the United States Armenian community. It was headed by an Armenian-American doctor, and already constituted an important scientific centre offering a wide range of services from psychological counselling to specialist medical care. It treated

women not only from Armenia, but also from Georgia, the Russian Federation and other countries of the region. Its charges were flexible, and the less well-off could be treated free of charge.

13. In response to a question from Mr. Riedel on the environmental impact issue, he said a new inspection programme for detecting harmful substances in drinking water was being implemented in Yerevan. Drinking water in Armenia came from natural spring sources; however, the pipeline system to the cities, towns and villages, built in the 1960s, was feeling the strain of urban immigration. Between 1992 and 1994, water and electricity supply problems had emerged, but renovation and reconstruction of pipelines had begun and were expected to be completed by mid-2000. A number of programmes were also being implemented with the assistance of international agencies and local benevolent organizations to establish a network of equipment for checking effluent levels.

14. Responding to another question from Mr. Riedel, he said that, with denationalization, pharmacies had become highly profitable. Until 31 December 1998 medicines had been sold in all pharmacies in urban and rural areas and there had been no shortage of drugs; the stockout figures had been the same for rural and urban areas. In January 1999 the Department of Health had decided that since the medicines were not in short supply, they would be sold only by pharmacies that met certain standards. Many pharmacies had closed as a result, while others had adapted to the new standards. There were also charitable pharmacies that provided vulnerable categories of the population with medicines.

15. Mr. TEXIER said that despite the delegation's answers to his earlier questions concerning articles 11 and 12 and aid distribution, he was still unclear about the enjoyment of the right to housing and related rights. He would be grateful for additional information enabling the Committee to gain a clear idea of what the Government was doing to address a difficult situation for which, admittedly, it was not entirely responsible. The Committee needed more detailed information if it was to contribute effectively to United Nations system-wide efforts to assist Armenia.

16. Mrs. JIMÉNEZ BUTRAGUEÑO endorsed Mr. Texier's views and also requested additional information on older people. She wished to know what measures the Government was taking to address the health needs of the elderly, and whether regular medical check-ups and organized geriatric care were provided.

17. The CHAIRPERSON invited the Committee to turn to the consideration of articles 13 to 15, and said she hoped the delegation would be in a position to furnish the additional replies to numbers 41-48 of the list of issues in writing by Monday, 29 November 1999, at the latest.

18. Mr. NAZARIAN (Armenia) referred Members to the report for details of the Armenian educational system. Despite the economic crisis of the early 1990s, numbers of students attending State schools had remained stable. Tables indicating the breakdown of educational establishments had been included, as well as additional information on the management structure. Despite economic difficulties, Armenia had numerous cultural institutions and establishments pursuing ever-expanding cultural activities deeply rooted in its history, and the latest cultural information was freely disseminated by the media.

19. Mr. RIEDEL said that his questions would chiefly address compliance with article 13 of the Covenant and the right to education. Paragraph 260 of the report stated that Armenia possessed 40 schools of 9 different types for physically and mentally backward children. That raised the fundamental question of who decided which child should go to what school. In many cases, parents preferred their children to enter the regular school system while the State authorities were in favour of special schooling. Who made the final decision? He noted that 40 special schools seemed rather a small number for 6,000 students. Was there any plan to expand that number in the future?

20. Paragraph 271 of the report referred to the problem of international recognition of the diplomas issued by the Armenian Ministry of Education and Science. Why were State diplomas not fully recognized internationally? Were the admission requirements of international institutions properly taken into account?

21. Paragraph 276 (b) referred to plans to increase parental financial participation in pre-school establishments. Such a measure appeared to discriminate against the poor, for children whose parents could afford to pay for pre-schooling would be better prepared to enter primary school. Paragraph 276 (d) referred to the Government's plan to expand the fee-paying sector in higher education establishments and to restrict State commissioning of student places to special areas for which demand was limited and to the training of unusually talented children. He felt that such a strategy ran counter to the underlying philosophy of article 13, paragraph 2 (b), which referred to the progressive introduction of free secondary education. Paragraph 276 (e) referred to a plan to reduce the number of State scholarships and use the savings achieved to develop the educational system. Would that not discourage children from the poorer groups from embarking on higher education? Those groups already tended to be underrepresented in higher education in all countries. Had the Armenian Government considered the possibility of using alternative means of encouraging enrolment in higher education, such as student loans repayable on graduation?

22. Mr. SADI said he had been very much struck by the tables in the response to question 44 giving the reasons for non-attendance at school and the disruption of lessons. In the opinion of school directors, 49.7 per cent of absences were due to poor health and 10.2 per cent to the fact that schoolchildren were forced to work in order to help their families. In the opinion of teachers, 21.8 per cent of absences were due to the poor health of teachers. Lastly, in the opinion of the children themselves, 53.9 per cent of absences were due to poor health and 15.8 per cent due to their being forced to work in order to help their families. He would like to know the reason for the marked discrepancy between those figures and for the generally high rates in all three tables.

23. Mr. GRISSA said that according to paragraph 247 of the report 10 years of secondary education had become compulsory in the mid-1970s, when Armenia had still formed part of the Soviet Union. Normally, secondary education covered a period of 7 or 8 years. At what age did secondary education begin in Armenia? Paragraph 248 went on to say that, before the dissolution of the Soviet Union, 6.6 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) had been assigned to education. According to paragraph 250, by 1995 the proportion had fallen to 1.3 per cent. He conceded that there had been a general decline in the national income, but wondered why the drop in spending on education had been so marked.

24. Paragraph 257 referred to a teacher-to-student ratio of 1:10. It went on to state that the low salary level was forcing qualified teachers to leave the system. If the less qualified remained, what was the effect on the quality of education? He also wished to know the ratio between the number of children who dropped out of school and those who entered the system. Lastly, noting that there was no mention of religious education, which was a sensitive issue in many countries, he asked whether religious groups were free to build their own schools and whether the deterioration of State-controlled education had led to any increase in the number of denominational schools.

25. Mr. THAPALIA said that, within the Soviet Union, minorities had been entitled to study in their own languages. According to Armenia's combined initial and second periodic report to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD/C/289/Add.2), however, teaching in Armenia now must be conducted in the official language. Furthermore, in paragraph 22 of its 1998 concluding observations on Armenia (CCPR/C/79/Add.100) the Human Rights Committee had expressed concern that it was not possible to ensure that small national minorities had access to educational facilities in their language of origin. Given that background, the Committee would be interested to hear whether the Covenant and the Committee's concluding observations would be disseminated in the minority languages in order to enable the people to assert their rights effectively.

26. With reference to the information given in the written response to question 45 on the inclusion of human rights teaching in school curricula, he noted that the Human Rights Committee had observed, in those same concluding observations, that human rights training of the legal profession and the judiciary was necessary for democracy, and therefore recommended that such training should be provided. He would like to know whether any arrangements were made to provide comprehensive training in human rights to judges and law professors in order to ensure that the provisions of the Covenant prevailed over ordinary legislation in compliance with the Constitution.

27. Mr. CEAUSU said he had been very much struck by the percentages of school-age children not attending school given in the first table of the response to issue 44. He asked whether the statistics in tables (a), (b) and (c) were for children who never went to school or for temporary absences later explained on grounds of health and the need to work. A rate of 20 per cent of children never attending school was far too high.

28. Paragraph 278 of the report referred to five programmes proposed by Armenian higher education establishments and financed by the European Union. He asked whether the delegation had any information on the specific content and purpose of the programmes. Experience showed that money from that source was sometimes squandered on projects that had no visible impact on education.

29. Paragraph 282 of the report gave some general information on bilateral arrangements for the training of Armenian students abroad. He would like some figures on the scale of those activities. He would also like to know whether most of the students in question returned, or whether they tended to establish themselves abroad. Were any incentives offered to encourage them to return?

30. In regard to the question of teaching in the minority languages, he noted that the Human Rights Committee and the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination had both expressed concern in their concluding observations that children of minorities had no opportunity to study in their own language in primary school. Was the Government aware of its responsibility to enable minorities to preserve their linguistic identity? Paragraph 286, on article 15 of the Covenant, stated that citizens belonging to national minorities were entitled to the preservation of their traditions and the development of their language and culture. However, the only specific information on their opportunities to do so was given in paragraph 289, which stated that the few national minorities in Armenia had ethnographic ensembles within their communities. Minorities should have access to theatres, newspapers and books in their own languages. Did other opportunities exist for them to preserve their cultural identity?

31. Mr. ANTANOVICH said that, according to the response to number 46 of the list of issues, an experiment had been undertaken to improve the administration and enhance the cost-effectiveness of theatres and other socio-cultural institutions. The underlying idea had been that the organizations should be funded from the income received for the work performed, which they were entitled to make use of to cover their costs. At the start of the 1990s, the idea that great cultural institutions should earn their own living had been quite popular in the Soviet Union. The attempt to do so had failed in nearly all the countries of the Commonwelath of Independent States (CIS). Was the multi-track system of financing cultural activities, for which Armenia had opted, working successfully?

32. The response went on to say that experience during the first phase of privatization in Armenia had shown that applying to social facilities the same approaches to ownership change as had been followed for industrial enterprises would inevitably lead to their commercialization and the loss of the social functions they performed. Did that imply that social facilities and cultural institutions performed an identical function? The response went on to mention the concept of "non-commercial privatization". He would welcome an explanation of that concept.

33. The responses to questions 47 and 48 contained only general statements. The Copyright and Related Rights Act was said to govern relationships arising in connection with the creation and use of works of literature and art and scientific works. What were the provisions of the Act?

34. Mr. AHMED said that, by all accounts, the people of Armenia had enjoyed a very high level of education during the Soviet period. After the break-up of the Soviet Union, the situation had changed, in regard to both general and higher education. The current economic crisis meant that those achievements were seriously jeopardized. In 1995, only 58 out of every 100 pupils had completed the tenth grade. There was obviously a need to accelerate the proposed reform of the educational system; but, given the decline in the proportion of GDP allocated to education between 1990 and 1995, how was that to be done? Assistance to Armenia from the international community should be targeted to the educational sector with a view to supporting free compulsory education and promoting free secondary education.

35. The deterioration in the quality of education was largely the outcome of the decline in the social status of teachers. Between 1994 and 1995, there had been a 15 per cent decline in the number of teachers with higher educational qualifications. Currently, one in every six teachers was said to be of retirement age, one in every four not to possess a relevant university degree and

two and a half per cent of all teachers to possess only a secondary education. According to a 1998 report by the United States Department of State, the formerly large network of Russian-language schools in Armenia had been greatly reduced in recent years and minorities, such as Greeks and Yezidis, were obliged to attend Armenian schools which offered few classes in their mother tongue. Most Yezidis were said not to attend school at all, partly for family reasons and partly because of discrimination on the part of their classmates and teachers. Clearly, reform was hampered by the current dire circumstances and international assistance was urgently required.

36. Mr. TEXIER asked whether, in view of the decline in the budget for education, Armenia was fully respecting the provisions of article 13, paragraph 2 (a), of the Covenant. Were all children of primary school age able to attend school? If not, what steps did the Government propose to take to remedy the situation. In that connection, it would be interesting for the Committee to receive information regarding the allocation of funds in the State budget, as well as the proportion of international assistance from bilateral or multilateral sources that was devoted to education.

37. Mr. RATTRAY asked the delegation what it expected to be achieved in regard to education over the next five years. Armenia's legacy from the Soviet Union had been a highly developed non-fee-paying education system. Since independence, there had been a significant deterioration, in terms not only of the of drop-out rate but also of access to education, together with a lowering of standards. What results were expected from the reform programme in terms of the obligation under the Covenant to make primary education compulsory, secondary education accessible to all, or in other words affordable, and higher education accessible to all on the basis of capacity?

38. It was frankly admitted in paragraph 272 of the report, that the fee-paying sector was growing and that the level of education offered by the non-State-operated higher educational establishments was fairly low, essentially because the training of teachers was not subject to control. The quality of education under privatization was thus recognized as being inferior to that formerly existing in State-operated institutions. Did some elements of the current strategy need to be changed in order to allow Armenia to honour its obligations?

39. Mr. WIMER ZAMBRANO asked for further information on the way in which formerly State-sponsored cultural activities were currently funded. Many cultural activities, such as national symphony orchestras, were regarded as essential for national prestige, and were consequently State-subsidized. He assumed that there must be some machinery in Armenia for eliciting private sponsorship.

40. Mr. HUNT inquired whether the various data compiled by the Armenian Government were broken down by gender. If that were not the case, such a process should be initiated, since Armenia might otherwise be in breach of its obligations under articles 2, paragraph 2, and 3 of the Covenant.

41. Mrs. JIMÉNEZ BUTRAGUEÑO asked whether voluntary associations existed to assist the preservation of Armenia's cultural heritage.

42. Mr. SAMVELIAN (Armenia) agreed that the number of special schools for physically and mentally backward children was insufficient. Moreover, in the post-Soviet period no new schools of that type had been opened. With regard to the placing of children in the different schools, it was the duty of parents or guardians to decide whether their children should attend ordinary or special schools. Parents' requests could be granted once the approval of a doctor had been obtained.

43. Turning to the subject of higher education, he said that in the past few years many private universities had been established. There were, however, problems relating to the recognition of qualifications awarded by such institutions. The Ministry of Education had therefore introduced a system of licensing. The Establishments that had been issued with a licence were able to award recognized diplomas and degrees. The validity of qualifications awarded overseas was assessed by a certification committee.

44. Mr. KAZHOYAN (Armenia) said that the number of higher education establishments had increased in recent years, in particular with the introduction of private fee-paying institutions. A similar trend had been observed in State universities, where both fee-paying and free places were awarded. It was true that the number of State scholarships had decreased. However, the large number of private and charitable scholarships available helped to compensate for that trend. In the private sector, a system had been introduced whereby the best students received their education free of charge.

45. The overall decrease in the number of students was partly the result of young people leaving Armenia. In the former Soviet Union higher education had been free and students had consequently attended university by sheer force of habit. Moreover, a university education had meant exemption from military service. Now that the situation had changed, students took more rational decisions, which meant that their numbers had fallen.

46. With regard to children dropping out of education, it was clear that in the vast majority of cases non-attendance at school was a temporary phenomenon. Children were able to leave education only if their performance was regularly very poor. They frequently pleaded illness to account for their absence. The table provided did not comprise exact data but constituted an opinion poll of school teachers and pupils conducted by the Ministry of Statistics. The quoted figure of 49.7 per cent was simply unrealistic.

47. Responding to the questions asked by Mr. Grissa, he said that all children were obliged to complete eight years of compulsory education and that there were two further years of voluntary studies. It was true that there had been a decrease in the number of students in the different categories, mainly in pre-school and kindergarten establishments. The reduction from 143,000 in 1992 to 73,000 in 1995 had two specific causes. The more important was that owing to forced unemployment many parents had decided to take care of their children themselves. Religious education was not provided in schools, although the history of religion was taught in higher education establishments. The only special religious education institute was the Holy Seminary of the Armenian Apostolic Church, which had three teaching centres for all members of the Armenian Diaspora. There were currently 280 students in the seminary preparing for careers as clergy in Armenian churches throughout the world.

48. On the issue of education for ethnic minorities, he said that according to the Law on Language Teaching, the only official language of tuition was Armenian. In Soviet times, half of the schools had been Armenian and the other half Russian. The vast majority of the "Russian" schools no longer existed since they had in fact been designed for the Armenian elite who wished to improve their employment prospects under the old system. There were still two Russian schools in Yerevan, in which tuition was dispensed in that language. In addition, Kurdish schools had been maintained, mainly in regions with a significant Kurdish population. Those schools faced both financial and academic problems owing to a lack of textbooks, which fortunately were provided through voluntary projects organized by activists resident overseas.

49. There were 20 different national minorities in Armenia, represented by the Union of National Minorities of Armenia. The Department of International Organizations and Human Rights attached to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was responsible for working with those minorities. The Union was represented in the Ministry and its leader acted as an adviser on minorities. The reporting process for the activities conducted by Armenia in the framework of its membership of the Council of Europe included details of the situation of national minorities in Armenia. Those minorities had stated, in the report on Armenia's accession to the Council, that they had encountered no specific instances of discrimination on the grounds of ethnicity. It was also worth noting that a Muslim Cultural Centre had been set up on the premises of an early-nineteenth-century Iranian mosque currently undergoing restoration.

50. With regard to human rights education, teaching was provided for pupils between the ages of 14 and 16, in accordance with the provisions of the 1993 Vienna Declaration. Human rights were also taught in universities, and seminars and training activities were provided for prosecutors, judges and prison officers. In addition, a school had been set up to train police officers in human rights, in accordance with the provisions of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. Further examples of the importance attached to human rights education were the publication of textbooks and the implementation of a teaching programme for officials under the Year 2000 Cooperation Agreement drawn up by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

51. On the subject of education, a programme had been introduced to try to eliminate the phenomenon of street children. Most of the children to be found on the streets were deliberately playing truant so as to engage in small-scale commercial activities. With the rapid increase in the numbers of such children, the problem was being accorded greater attention. Under the European Union TACIS and TEMPUS programmes, textbooks had begun to be produced in Armenian. Students and teachers had also been sent abroad for training seminars and, before leaving, had signed an undertaking that they would use the knowledge they acquired for Armenia's benefit. When they returned home, their employment prospects were greatly improved and many of them had found work in international organizations and companies with offices in Yerevan.

52. As for magazines and newspapers for ethnic minorities, the Union of National Minorities had its own publication. The Kurdish minority had the world's only Kurdish-language

newspaper, entitled Ria Tza. The Russian and Ukrainian minorities also had their own publications. No restrictions were imposed on such groups although they did experience financial problems owing to the small numbers of people involved.

53. With regard to the commercialization of cultural centres, all cinemas in Armenia had been privatized in the post-Soviet period. Most of them had become commercial centres of various sorts, such as oriental markets or shops selling luxury western goods. Only three still retained their original purpose, since it was difficult for cinemas to remain financially viable.

54. Returning to the subject of education, he said that although it was true that 42 per cent of pupils did not complete 10 years of formal education in ordinary schools, many went on to vocational and technical institutes, and subsequently to higher education. Although the number of teachers had decreased, no one could actually enter the profession without having obtained a higher education diploma. In the vast majority of cases, teachers were willing to offer their services to private universities, where the wages they received were often higher than in schools. Their wages were paid through tuition fees, whereas primary and secondary education was free, so that teachers in that sector,. could be paid only from the national budget. State educational establishments were seeking additional funding and had established twinning arrangements with various communities. An example was the Armenian-Argentine school in Yerevan, which received financial support from the two communities and had been officially opened by the two national Presidents.

55. Responding to remarks about the absence of quality control for teachers in private universities, he explained that the majority of the teachers concerned came from State-run establishments and supplemented their income by teaching extra hours in the private sector. In that sense teaching standards were guaranteed. A further guarantee was the licensing system already described.

56. He confirmed that the Government did indeed subsidize cultural activities. Armenia had a long-standing and cherished tradition of performing arts as was borne out by the survival of more than 10 symphony orchestras and 60 theatre companies notwithstanding the economic and other troubles of recent years. The Government had recently given US$ 50,000 to the Armenian National Choir to enable it to perform in France and Switzerland. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) was also active in sponsoring cultural events: an Armenian symphony orchestra had recently given a concert in Lebanon, under the patronage of the Armenian Government and Armenia's UNESCO Committee. Orchestras tended to keep their ticket prices very low for performances in Armenia in order to continue to attract local audiences, and aimed to make a profit during international tours.

57. As for the voluntary sector, many associations and individuals abroad had sponsored cultural, educational and sports activities in Armenia. Recently, successful locally-based businessmen had started to support such events.

58. Armenia's UNESCO Committee had played a decisive role in preserving the country's cultural heritage by protecting architectural monuments and archaeological sites both in Armenia and throughout the Middle East. Three sites had now been included in the World Heritage List.

The Matenadaran Museum referred to in paragraph 290 of the report, was economically viable. It received State funding; and fees were also charged for experts who wished to consult the books and manuscripts it housed. Other similar establishments were also supported by the Government.

59. Mr. SAMVELIAN (Armenia), said that according to statistics available the average number of students in higher education was 35,000, of whom around 20,000 were female and 15,000 male. Ninety per cent of medical students and 75-80 per cent of teacher training and art school students were female. The number of young women embarking on other courses including computing, banking and international law was also rising. Teachers were predominantly female in Armenia, especially at primary school level, where they represented 94 per cent, while 75 per cent of the teachers at secondary and higher levels of education were women.

60. Mr. KAZHOYAN (Armenia), replying to a question about the mechanism for distributing international aid, said that the main mechanism was the so-called "system of family aid", which was targeted on all those families that qualified as being poor. The aid package included exemption from payment of bills for electricity and other essential services as well as the provision of basic foodstuffs donated by international organizations. The system was coordinated by the Ministry of Social Security and currently covered around 300,000 families. Periodic checks were carried out to ensure that families receiving such assistance were still entitled to it. As a result of the last check carried out some 35,000 had been struck off the list of beneficiaries while another 10,000 had been added to it.

61. Mr. GRISSA said that he had still not fully understood the education system and asked at what age children completed primary and secondary education. The delegation had also failed to explain the reasons for the disproportionately large reduction in government spending on education. As for its remarks concerning sponsorship of and support for schools, he assumed that the children who attended the Armenian-Argentine school came from privileged backgrounds. Did the establishment of such schools not imply that a new elite was being created to replace that of the former Soviet regime?

62. Mr. RIEDEL said that when describing the changes that had occurred in education such as privatization, sponsorship and other means of supports in the report (para. 276) and in its replies to the Committee, the delegation had not addressed the matter of its obligations under article 13, paragraph 2, of the Covenant, namely, compulsory primary education free of charge and the progressive introduction of free secondary and higher education. States parties to the Covenant were sometimes under the impression that they were at liberty to adopt any measures relating to education they deemed to be economically viable. However, that was not the case; they must fulfil the obligations they had assumed. He would welcome some further explanation on that score.

63. Mr. AHMED said that he had earlier referred to the need for international aid to Armenia to be targeted towards education and in particular towards ensuring compulsory education until the eighth grade. Had Armenia in fact received any international aid from foreign Governments rather than from the diaspora, and if so, for what purposes had it been used?

64. Mr. HUNT thanked the delegation for the disaggregated data provided; it was indeed encouraging that such statistics were available. He recommended that, where appropriate, such data should be provided in Armenia's next report, in line with the Committee's revised reporting guidelines for States parties.

65. Mrs. JIMÉNEZ BUTRAGUEÑO said that the delegation had not really answered her earlier question about the existence of voluntary associations or charitable organizations and their assistance to the community, which the Government was no longer in a position to provide.

66. Mr. RATTRAY said he was somewhat perplexed by the delegation's remark that the quality of teaching in private universities was guaranteed by the fact that most teachers came from the State sector. It seemed to contradict the statement in paragraph 272 of the report to the effect that the level of education offered by the private sector was fairly low since the training of their teachers was not subject to control. Which of the two statements was correct?

67. Mr. KAZHOYAN (Armenia) said that Armenian children started primary school at the age of 6 or 7 and completed their secondary education at the age of 16 or 17. Primary schools covered the first three grades, while secondary schools covered grades 4 to 10. There were two main reasons for the considerable reduction in government spending on education: first, the downsizing of the budget, due to the country's economic problems, and second, the relocation of many nursery facilities.

68. With regard to Armenia's obligations under article 13 of the Covenant, he pointed out that primary and secondary education were still provided free of charge in Armenia. The only change since the end of the Soviet regime had been the emergence of privately run higher educational establishments. The former Soviet Union had attached great importance to higher education but the system it had established was not viable and did not reflect real needs. Owing to the rise in emigration and conscription, the number of young people entering higher education had fallen: hence the reduction in the budget. It was also important to bear in mind that many government and private scholarships were available for those applying to private universities. All things considered, he believed that opportunities for higher education were by and large the same as in the past.

69. The children attending the Armenian-Argentine school were those who lived in the neighbourhood. That was just one example among many of schools sponsored by associations in or Governments of other countries. In that connection, all Armenian schools generally taught between two and four foreign languages, with Russian as the first foreign language,combined with English, French, Farsi, Arabic or German. The teaching of those languages in schools and higher educational establishments was sponsored by the embassy or competent government body concerned, such as the British Council in the case of English-language teaching. A variety of other courses were offered to Armenian students and specialists through the assistance of Governments and NGOs from other countries.

70. Among the voluntary associations and charitable organizations active in Armenia were the Armenian Children's Fund, which provided assistance to orphans and children with special needs; and the recently established Armenian Union of Disabled People which aside from raising awareness about disabled people and catering for their everyday needs had also organized the

participation of three disabled athletes in the New York marathon. Another association, called Earth and Culture, coordinated a network of young volunteers working with the disabled and elderly in Armenian communities throughout the world, and on archaeological and art restoration projects.

71. Mr. NAZARIAN (Armenia) said that the delegation had endeavoured to provide a full picture of the situation in Armenia vis-à-vis the Covenant and to respond to all the Committee's queries through its report, written replies and update on recent legislation. The dialogue with the Committee had provided a unique opportunity for an open exchange of views and Members' comments would be duly followed up in the promotion and protection of the rights set forth in the Covenant in Armenia..

72. The CHAIRPERSON said that the end of the consideration of Armenia's initial report did not signal the end of its relationship with the Committee, which looked forward to enhancing its cooperation with Armenia following the finalization of its concluding observations on Armenia's report. The concluding observations would be adopted in a closed meeting and it was expected that they would be forwarded to the Permanent Mission of Armenia before the end of the session. She thanked the delegation for its very constructive dialogue with the Committee wished those of its members returning to Armenia a safe journey home.

73. The delegation of Armenia withdrew.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.